

Robinson-Aiken Slave Building and Kitchens
48 Elizabeth Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-276

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. SC-276

ROBINSON-AIKEN SLAVE BUILDING AND KITCHENS

Address: 48 Elizabeth Street, Charleston, Charleston County,
South Carolina.

Present Owner: I'On Lowndes Rhett, 48 Elizabeth Street, Charleston,
South Carolina.

Brief Statement of Significance: A rare example of its type with notable archi-
tectural character.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: John Robinson, original owner, bought the land in 1817. (Charleston County Mesne Conveyance Office, vol. V-8, p. 393 [longhand]). He sold house in 1826 to William Aiken, Charles Edmonston and Lewis A. Pitray. (Ibid. vol. T-9, p. 238). Governor William Aiken lived here and house went to his daughter, Mrs. A. Burnet Rhett. (Information from Mrs. I'On Lowndes Rhett).
- B. Date of Erection: About 1830.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement
1. Architectural character: This building forms an integral part of a town house group which remains virtually complete.
 2. Condition of fabric: Generally sound; trim on some unused portions is not maintained.
- B. Technical Description of Exterior
1. Number of stories, bays, over-all dimensions, layout: Two stories; ten bays; 19'-2" x 71'-5"; rectangular.
 2. Foundations: Very low.
 3. Wall construction: Brick, stuccoed and marked off with "joints", courses 18" high, 15" thick. Weathered gray color; four courses of brick are 1'-1" high.
 4. Structural system: Brick bearing walls, frame partitions, frame floor and roof systems. Second-floor joists are 3" x 10", 16" on centers. Lintels over openings in the brick walls are sash-sawn timbers.

5. Chimneys: Three, hooded chimneys along the east (rear) wall.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Six doorways--simple masonry openings without trim--are on the west (front) wall; the two toward the south end are divided, solid below and glazed above. The other doors are board and batten, except for a two-panel replacement near the center. A wide doorway is centered on the north end wall; the head is a four-centered arch. It contains a single door which is paneled near the bottom and louvered above.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The four first-story windows are closed by board and batten shutters. The ten second-story windows have a glazed transom above a board and batten shutter. A window centered above the north door has been altered; the original opening resembles that of the doorway. A small round opening containing a cast-iron grille is centered in the tympanum of the pediments.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, slate covering.
 - b. Cornice: Blocky stucco cornice, which is pedimented at the gables.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans; first floor: A central stair hall, giving access to the second floor, separates a large kitchen (used for slaves originally) on the north end from two masters' kitchen rooms at the south end. Second floor: Two rooms north of the stair and three rooms south of the stair. A narrow corridor along the west wall connects these rooms. The three interior rooms have only borrowed light, since the east wall is blank.
2. Stairways: There is a low landing; the stair is enclosed above. There are 16 risers.
3. Flooring: First floor: Wide boards. There are flagstones near the east wall of the south kitchen. Second floor: 6" tongue-and-groove pine boards; some 11" boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, painted and whitewashed. Plaster is applied direct to brick walls, and to split

wood lath on frame partitions and ceilings; there have been repairs, and some places where it has fallen, but in general the condition is good.

5. Doors: Board and batten doors, with transom lights above. wrought-iron strap hinges on pintles driven into casings.
6. Decorative features and trim: Doorways have plain trim; window openings have no trim. The south kitchen has a hook strip along the wall.
7. Notable hardware: Some old cast-iron box locks remain.
8. Heating: Second-floor rooms have simple fireplaces. There are three large arched kitchen fireplaces. The one in the north kitchen retains a wrought-iron crane. The one in the south kitchen has been closed; a large built-in stove with a hood above was built alongside. The built-in stove is of a mid-19th century type.

D. Site

1. Orientation: The building was originally detached from house, but now adjoins a modern kitchen wing which was attached to the house. The west front faces the yard, and balances the service building and stable, which it resembles closely.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
June 1963

Addendum to:

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